No. 26

THE

STOLEN BANNER BROUGHT BACK;

OR

A LETTER

TO THE

REV. HENRY JACKSON DOBBIN, D.D.,

CONTAINING

STRICTURES ON A SERMON PREACHED IN BALLYMENA, JANUARY 20TH, 1850.

BY JOHN PAUL, JUN.

"And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach."—ISAIAH.

"Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets; and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres."—CHRIST.

"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."—JESUS.

Tell-True Temple, May, 1850.

TO BE HAD AT THE BOOKSELLERS.

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DEAR DOCTOR,

We read of some who creep into houses, and lead captive silly women; and I am greatly mistaken if there are not some ministers of the Gospel who act in this cowardly manner, even at the present day. Such a course of conduct is dishonorable, as well as unfair. But I am happy to find that you do not rank among those who pursue such a detestable course. You have displayed greater boldness than those that would act in such a cowardly manner; for, in the sermon that you preached on the occasion of the lamented death of the Rev. James Mackeown, you make a bold and sweeping assertion—an assertion that has scarcely been paralleled by any of your brethren: at least, few of them have had the audacity to make such claims in a public manner: for you not only uttered the language referred to from the pulpit, but committed the same to writing, and sent it to the world.

I refer to what you assert respecting the standing of "the modern Covenanters," and that of the section of the Presbyterian Church to which you belong. I will not dwell on what you say respecting the dead—respecting the reasons that induced the late Rev. Mr. Mackeown to leave the Reformed Presbyterian Church and join the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as he is not alive to speak for himself; but I shall more particularly consider the language you employ expressive of your own sentiments on this subject. After having mentioned a certain combination of circumstances, which you assign as the cause that induced the conviction in the mind of your recently deceased brother, "that in reference to the principles connected with the relations of christians to the civil government, as well as to the terms of Church Communion, the General Assembly were more thoroughly in accordance with the Word of God

and the teaching and practices of the Covenanted Church of Scotland, than the modern Covenanters were." You go on to say, respecting the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which you call "the Modern Covenanters" :—

"I wish to speak with the sincerest respect of that body. I admire them for their faithfulness, both in Scotland and in this country, in times of general defection. I honour them for their steadfastness in seasons of peculiar trial—for their bold assertion of great principles, when the courage of multitudes had failed, and the love of many had waxed cold—for the abundant labours of their pastors, and the eminent piety of their people; yet, nevertheless, I am free to maintain that the General Assembly, and not they, are the genuine descendants of the Covenanting Church of Scotland, in its purest and brightest period—the inheritors of her principles, and the uplifters of her banner."

In reference to the flower of rhetoric with which this quotation ends, I beg leave to say, that you appear to me to deserve great credit for the boldness of the assertion you make, and which you leave when made without the least shadow of proof. But while I give you credit for the courage evinced in the rounding of your period, I cannot give you credit for the truth of the assertion "that the General Assembly . . . are the genuine descendants of the Covenanting Church of Scotland," &c.; and I say in all sincerity, that I question very much whether a dozen of your own hearers are so ignorant as to believe the statement. Still I cannot bear the insult offered to "the Modern Covenanters" to pass without exposure. But as your assertion is left altogether without proof, I am at a loss to determine how you trace your succession from the Covenanters of the Second Reformation. Do you trace it through the Established Church of Scotland, with which you held communion before the disruption took place in that Church—before the Free Church existed as a separate body? It should appear that, notwithstanding the patronage, the Erastianism, and the Moderatism of that Church, the Synod of Ulster courted connexion with it: hence says one of the ministers of that Synod (the Rev. John Dill, late of Carnmoney), when speaking of unquali-

fied subscription of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1837) :—

"I am aware, indeed, that unqualified subscription was necessary, in order to secure that nondescript connexion which you have lately formed with the Scottish Church; but on this point I am constrained to adopt—with a very slight alteration—the language of Mr. Carlyle:—'In a real, effective union with the Church of Scotland, founded on Scriptural principles, no man would more sincerely rejoice than I would. But it does not become the Synod to present itself in a crouching attitude before the Church of Scotland, begging that its ministers may be tolerated in the pulpits of that church, and proposing, for the attainment of that object, to enforce unqualified subscription to its articles, but without any stipulations on its own part."

That such a connexion really obtained, I believe there are none will venture to deny. Now, my dear Sir, do you believe the Established Church of Scotland bore aloft the standard of the Covenanters of the Second Reformation? If they did not—if the Established Church of Scotland deserted the principles of the ancient Covenanters—if the ministers and members of that Church cast away the banner of "Christ's crown and covenant," and submitted to an earthly head in the place of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the General Assembly in Ireland recognised them as brethren, how can it be said in truth of the Irish Assembly, that they are the genuine descendants of the Covenanting Church in its purest and brightest period? Did the Established Church of Scotland take up the standard of the covenant at the time of the Revolution settlement? Did they, or did they not? This is a question of paramount importance. I pause for a reply.

In the mean time, till you get an opportunity of reading and studying the subject, and consulting with some of the most eminent of your brethren in the General Assembly, I shall turn to a writer whose evidence you will not dispute. Let the Rev. Dr. Hetherington himself,—now a minister of the Free Church with which you are holding communion, but a minister of that very establishment at the time when he wrote his "History of the Church of Scotland,"

answer the question. (I shall not trouble you with quoting the page, as there are different editions of the work, and as the places will be easily found under the year to which the historian refers.) Speaking of the origin of the present Established Church of Scotland, when the great majority of Presbyterians was incorporated in it, while but a comparatively small number stood aloof, and continued faithful to their vows—

"The Cameronian Covenanters," says he, "alone disdained to stoop to compromise or concealment, boldly avowed their principles, and loudly censured the Church for want of faithfulness and zeal, especially, because in the Revolution Settlement no direct recognition had been made of the national covenant, and of the Reformation, which these solemn bonds had been so instrumental in effecting," &c.

It cannot be disputed that the small band here referred to were the germ of the present Reformed Presbyterian Church, or of the "Cameronians," as the Covenanters are sometimes called in Scotland.

Now, what was the character of the Established Church of Scotland? Of what materials was it composed at the time of the Revolution Settlement? Let the same historian furnish an answer.

"Within the Church there were three parties:—the aged ministers, who had been ejected at the commencement of the persecution; . . . the ministers who had to a greater or less degree conformed to prelacy, accepted the indulgences, and became tainted somewhat with a tendency to laxity and indifference in doctrine, discipline, and government; and the unconquered Covenanters, who had followed Cameron, Cargill, and Renwick. . . . . The members of the first party were not more than 60; those of the last only 3; while those of the middle party amounted to more than double the number of both the others combined. It was perfectly manifest, therefore, that no measure which the more faithful and zealous party should propose, could be carried, if the middle party should resolve to oppose it; and there was no reason to hope that men who had tamely submitted to the tyranny of Charles and James, and even bowed beneath the prelatic yoke, would readily assume an attitude of bold resistance to the Erastian policy of William. Accordingly, from the very hour when it met, the Assembly was laid under an almost fatal necessity of entering into a compromise, and keeping in comparative abeyance what its

wisest and best members knew to be the great and essential principles of the true Presbyterian Church."

"Though the acts of Parliament," adds the historian, "made no mention of the Second Reformation and the national covenants, it was the direct duty of the Church to have declared her adherence to both; and though the state had still refused to recognise them, the Church would, by this avowal, have at least escaped from being justly exposed to the charge of having submitted to a violation of her own sacred covenants. In the same spirit of compromise the Church showed herself but too ready to comply with the king's pernicious policy, of introducing as many as possible of the prelatic clergy within the national church. This was begun by the first General Assembly, and continued for several succeeding years, though not to the full extent wished by William, till a very considerable number of those men, whose hands had been deeply dyed in the guilt of the persecution, were received into the bosom of that church which they had so long striven utterly to destroy. It was absolutely impossible that such men could become true Presbyterians; and the very alacrity with which many of them subscribed the Confession of Faith, only proved the more clearly that they were void of either faith or honour. Their admission into the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was the most fatal event which ever occurred in the eventful history of that Church. It infused a baneful poison into her very heart, whence, ere long, flowed forth a lethal stream, corrupting and paralysing her whole frame. It sowed the noxious seed which gradually sprang up, and expanded into the deadly upas-tree of Moderatism, shedding a moral blight over the whole of her once fair and fruitful vineyard, till it withered into a lifeless wilderness."

Such was the Church with which the Synod of Ulster courted connexion, and the General Assembly held communion! Was this the way they inherited the principles of the Covenanting Church in the purest period! Was this the way they lifted up her banners!!! Perhaps you are of opinion that the Irish Presbyterian ministers took up the banner of the covenant at a much earlier period; but as you have not given any definite information on the subject, to avoid the charge of partiality I shall refer to another author in your own communion. In Mr. M'Comb's Presbyterian Almanac, of a former year, under the head of "The History of the Regium Donum," we find the following information:—

"The Presbyterian ministers who settled in this country towards the commencement of the 17th century, preached in

the churches, and enjoyed a share of the revenues of the Irish Ecclesiastical Establishment. The Irish Confession of Faith, drawn up in 1615, by Ussher, and sanctioned by royal authority, was so framed as to compromise the differences between Prelatists and non-conformists. But nearly twenty years afterwards, the constitution of the Irish establishment was changed, and strict conformity to the articles and ritual of the Church of England was rigidly enforced. The Presbyterian ministers were now suspended, and exposed to many hardships. For several years they remained in most uncomfortable circumstances. When Charles I. was beheaded, and when Cromwell was made Protector, they were involved in fresh troubles, for they refused to recognise the usurper as entitled to their allegiance, and continued, in their public worship to pray for the exiled Prince Charles II, as their lawful sovereign. But, towards the end of the Protectorate their prospects brightened, and they each received an endowment of £100 a-year out of the public treasury. On the restoration of Charles II. this grant was withdrawn—the Presbyterian ministers were again driven from the establishment, and greatly harassed by prelatic persecution. Their sufferings were at length made known to the King, and even that profligate monarch was constrained to acknowledge their claims upon his consideration. It was too bad, he admitted, that they should first suffer FOR him, and then suffer UNDER him. He accordingly proposed to settle upon them an allowance of £1200 per annum, but when the money came to be paid, it was found that only the one-half of that sum was then at the royal disposal. This grant, which was made in the year 1672, may be considered as the commencement of the Regium Donum."

Were these Presbyterian ministers the successors of the persecuted Covenanters? Did they not rather prove themselves to be brethren of the indulged? Let us turn again to Dr. Hetherington's History of the Church of Scotland—to the history of that very year whence Mr. M'Comb dates the origin of the *regium donum* :—

"The aspect of affairs," says the Scottish historian, "grows darker, as we enter upon the year 1672. . . . . The fines which had been hitherto sufficiently oppressive, were increased and exacted with double rigour. The acts against conventicles and field-preachings were enforced with immitigable cruelty. The ejected ministers were hunted from place to place, as if they had been wolves, who were to be exterminated as a matter of public duty. An act was passed against what parliament was pleased to term 'unlawful ordinations,' by which was meant all except prelatic ordination. . . . . But the most important matter of this year was the second indulgence, which was promulgated by the Council on the 3rd of September," &c.

Now, my dear sir, what think you of these statements? Will you venture to assert that the indulged Ministers in Scotland and in Ireland were the inheritors of the principles, and the uplifters of the banner of the Covenanting Church of Scotland in its purest and brightest period!!! Did the Presbyterian church in Ireland attain to greater purity shortly after the favour conferred upon her by the profligate monarch? Did she evince greater attachment to the national covenant of Scotland, and the solemn league and covenant? If she did, how came she to have children so different as you and Dr. Montgomery, who has written outlines of the history of your common mother church? How came she to be so deeply infested not only with Armenian, but also with Socinian and Arian principles? You will excuse me for giving a few quotations from the Rev. Dr. Henry Montgomery's "Outlines of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland;" as he appears to have recorded matters of fact without partiality, although his religious views have been so much opposed to those of Covenanters that *they* never could hold ecclesiastical communion with any that avow the principles he has espoused; nor is there a member in the pale of the modern Covenanting church suspected of being favourable to such religious opinions. If, however, any of the statements quoted from his "Outlines" appear to you to be incorrect, I hope you will prove them so, and set the public right with respect to them. But I presume you will readily admit that Dr. Montgomery is too honourable a gentleman, knowingly to state a falsehood to the world. In the 264th p. of vol. ii. of "The Unitarian Magazine and Bible Christian," he writes thus:—

"During the principal struggles and sufferings of the Scotch Covenanters, in the reign of Charles II. and James II., the Irish Presbyterians enjoyed not only repose, but favour. Charles, indeed, in the first year of his reign, re-established Episcopacy, and strictly prohibited all religious worship, except in conformity with the Service Book of the Church of England; and Lord Montgomery, of Ards, who had twice signed the solemn league and covenant, pledging him to the 'extirpation of prelacy,' prevailed upon the parliament to pass

an edict for the public burning of that very covenant, by the hands of the common hangman, in all the principal towns of Ireland! Before this storm the Presbyterian ministers very meekly bowed; and contented themselves with teaching their people, from house to house. They also laid several memorials before the king, setting forth their attachment to the monarchy, and their courageous protest against Cromwell's usurpation. By degrees they resumed their public ministrations, and finally, through the instrumentality of Sir Arthur Forbes, (afterwards created Viscount Granard), they obtained an annual pension from the king of £1200—to be equally divided amongst them. Thus protected and favoured, they raked up no embers from the ashes of the covenant, and manifested but little sympathy with their persecuted brethren in Scotland. On the contrary, so great was their dread of Covenanting principles, that about the year 1671, they suspended David Houston, one of their licentiates, for advocating the perpetuity of the covenant. Mr. Houston appears to have been a young man of great energy, and considerable talents; and although Dr. Reid disparagingly calls him 'an indiscreet and turbulent licentiate,' and hints something evil in reference to his moral character, I believe that his only real crime consisted in his having adopted the views of the Scottish Covenanters, from Alex. Peden, one of their most intrepid and enthusiastic preachers. Those views he broached at Ballymoney, whilst supplying a vacancy; and he soon acquired remarkable popularity by preaching in private houses and in the fields. This gave great offence to the neighbouring ministers, whose congregations became distracted and excited, so that, jealous of his popularity, or fearing that he might draw down upon them the displeasure of Government, his license to preach was withdrawn by the Presbytery of Route; and about the year 1673 he was invited over to Scotland, where he became a zealous preacher amongst 'the Society people,' as the Covenanters were then called. The Revolution Settlement of Wm. III., however, by making Presbyterianism the established religion of Scotland, almost extinguished the stricter views of the Covenanters in that country; and David Houston returned to Ireland, where a small place of worship was built for him at Armoy, between the Giant's Causeway and Ballycastle. There he officiated for about twelve years, amidst much love and esteem; and as often as impaired health permitted, he preached in various parts of the counties of Antrim, Down, and Derry, to small societies of rigid Presbyterians, who participated in his views."

Now, it may be thought that the other Presbyterians, although not much in love with the covenants, were very orthodox in other respects; but alas! the contrary seems to be matter of fact. When speaking of the separation of the Antrim Presbytery from that body with which the members of that Presbytery were

formerly incorporated, Dr. Montgomery says (vol. ii. page 206)—

"Their combination, besides, in one Presbytery, gave union to their operations, and placed them before the world as a distinct religious association; so that instead of having comparatively little influence, as when they were formerly mingled with the general mass of orthodoxy, their name and power began to be felt even beyond the sphere of their own immediate labours. By degrees, also, they preached more boldly and distinctly—the horror of new-light doctrines became less and less—several ministers of the Synod occasionally officiated in their pulpits—a more friendly feeling gradually sprang up between the two bodies, and even in the Synod, subscription to the Westminster Confession speedily became so loose and vague as to be little more than a matter of form. Thus a great calm succeeded the storm which had raged during the seven Synods; and at the end of twenty years, which produced no event of any importance, the two bodies practically differed so very little, that ministers and congregations repeatedly passed from one to the other, retaining intact all their rights, privileges, and properties. The congregations of the Presbytery being, in general, more wealthy than those of the Synod, had no difficulty in procuring leading ministers from the so-called orthodox body, in all cases of vacancy; and these were usually found to be even more new-light in their doctrinal views than the members of the society which they joined."

I shall not dwell on the state of affairs in the Synod of Ulster in the year 1810, which Dr. Montgomery celebrates so much, when he says, "Amidst a recognised variety of *creeds*, there was perfect '*unity of spirit*,'" &c.; nor on the declaration of a Rev. Dr. in his evidence before the commissioners of education inquiry, incorporated in the minutes of the Synod of Ulster for A.D. 1827—that there were, to the best of his knowledge, 35 Arians in the Synod. We need not ask you whether so many declared themselves Arians, or whether those remaining suspected of heterodox sentiments have died out and been succeeded by orthodox ministers; for, when it is considered that so much heterodoxy prevailed in the Synod of Ulster till the time when Dr. Montgomery and his declared Unitarian brethren separated from that Synod, I can scarcely imagine that you will trace your descent from the ancient Covenanters through that Synod. Perhaps

it is through the Seceders you trace the relationship, as it appears they were stricter Calvanists than the members of the Synod of Ulster; for we learn from the same History of the Presbyterian Church, by Dr. Montgomery, (vol. ii. page 232), that—

"The Seceders, after the year 1746, extended with considerable rapidity—especially amongst the humbler classes of Presbyterians. Like most new sects, they were very zealous, and much addicted to 'fishing in muddy water.' The members of the General Synod of Ulster were represented, I believe not unjustly, as 'wolves in sheep's clothing;' or, in other words, as Calvanistic *professors*, but Armenian *believers*."

But although you may trace some resemblance between the ancient Covenanters and the Seceders, in regard to strict calvanistic views, I am at a loss to understand what you regard as the genuine principles of the ancient Covenanters, "connected with the relations of christians to the civil government"—whether you are a *Burgher*, or *Anti-Burgher* Seceder. But I believe you were not speaking of your own opinions in relation to the civil government, but of the opinions of the General Assembly. Have all the members of the Assembly become Burgher Seceders, or do they rejoice in the euphonian name of *Anti-Burghers?* On the contrary, did not the Seceders that joined the Synod of Ulster, while that Synod was in connexion with the Established Church of Scotland, virtually declare to the world that their forefathers were wrong in leaving that establishment? There is, however, no doubt that the Seceders who joined the Synod of Ulster were almost as orthodox as that Synod itself, "in reference to the principles connected with the relations of christians to the civil government."

A quotation from Dr. Montgomery's history will suffice to prove their orthodoxy in this respect. After having referred to the *regium donum* given to the ministers of the Synod of Ulster, in the year 1803, and to the government classification of the different congregations, from which he infers that the scheme was 'purely one of policy;' and after having told of a congregation, consisting of a thousand families, who

spake against the reception of the *regium donum*; and when it was proposed by their pastor, that if they should advance his stipend £50 per annum, he would refuse the royal grant—of the proof that they gave by refusing to do so, 'that they did not hold the great principles,' about which they had declaimed for so many months, to be worth *one shilling a-year!*—the Rev. Dr. proceeds to say :—

"The two Synods of Presbyterian Seceders—the orthodox Burghers, and Anti-Burghers—acted in a manner precisely similar to the conduct of this *noble* congregation. They raised 'a mighty pother' over all Ulster—they foamed with indignation against 'the Erastianism of the General Synod, and against the utter degradation of Presbyterians, in submitting to accept the alms of the state!' They talked so loud, and looked so grave, that many people believed them to be in earnest; and consequently, in very many places, their small and poor congregations were largely recruited by desertions from those of the General Synod; and in several other localities they collected *new* congregations from the fields of their neighbours, in which they had industriously sown the seeds of discontent. This game having been played for six years, and all the malcontents of the General Synod having been gathered into their own folds, a few leaders, meanly and privately, sneaked over to London in the year 1809, under Episcopalian ('*Erastian*') influence; and after several months' negotiation, returned with a paltry government grant, in their pockets, of £40, £50, and £70 a-year, for their own three classes! The history of clerical trickery and meanness presents nothing *lower* than this. The loud tongues became dumb—the froth and fury of declamation disappeared—and even 'the cant of conscience' was heard no more! They took 'the accursed thing.'"—(Vol. ii., page 338.)

Then the historian goes on to tell, that—

"One, and only one, honourable Seceding minister, indeed, did lift his manly and indignant testimony against this apostacy and degradation. This was the truly honest, the profoundly learned, and the every-way excellent James Bryce, of Killaig, near Coleraine," &c.

Now, my dear sir, I would ask you, in reference to the conduct of the Seceders that have joined the Assembly, as briefly brought before our minds by this short extract from history, was this the way the Co-

venanters of the Second Reformation would have acted? Or, when the highest officer in the General Assembly, "cap in hand," as an humble suppliant, kneels in the dust of self-degradation, imploring Her Majesty's Government, through the lowest official, for a little more *regium donum*, to make compensation in some measure for the potato blight, we would ask you,—Is this the genius of ancient Covenanterism? Is this her spirit? Is this her mien? Was this the way the Melvilles would have acted? History informs us, that when Andrew Melville declined the authority of the privy council, "he gave dire offence to the king, who was jealous to excess of every limitation of his absolute prerogative; and roused the despotic heart of Arran to a degree of ungovernable fury. Nothing could appal the dauntless spirit of Melville. Unclasping his Hebrew bible from his girdle, and throwing it on the table, he said, 'These are my instructors; see if any of you can judge of them, or show that I have passed my injunctions.'" But, oh, the times!—oh, the manners! Is not a distant hint from a landlord, or member of Parliament, of the withdrawal of the Government pension, almost enough to awe the Assembly into silence? You may imagine this letter is a libel on the Assembly; but if any of the facts stated in the histories be disproved, I will retract all that I have built upon such statements. I will here add, that I highly esteem many ministers of the General Assembly, and love them for their orthodoxy and zeal; and I sincerely rejoice to hear of their success in every good cause. But I hope there will soon be many M'Naughtens and many Rosemary-street congregations—many to pull away the neck from the yoke of bondage—many congregations to say to their ministers, and to the candidates for the pastoral office, "We will give you an adequate support; and if you do not refuse the *pension*, you cannot on any other terms be our minister." Yet, after all, I am really at a loss to know how you trace your descent from the Covenanters—whether it be through the indulged, through the Church of England, through the Established Church of Scotland, through the Free Church, through the Unitarians, through the Seceders—Burghers, or Anti-

Burghers. Still, I am not utterly without hope that you may yet become a Covenanter; for the language of Jehovah is—

"Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord."—JER. iii., 1.

Follow the footsteps of the Covenanters of the Second Reformation, before you claim to be their legitimate offspring. But I had almost forgotten that you gave us a hint respecting the superiority of your "terms of Church Communion," and that you are the descendants of the Covenanting Church in its *purest*, as well as in its "brightest period."

I wish you would be a little more explicit on this point, and let me know wherein your terms of communion excel. Is it in the recognition of the Covenants, National and Solemn League? or in the strict requirement of a walk and conversation becoming the Gospel? Do you excel the "Modern Covenanters" in carefully guarding the table of the Lord from those that refuse to erect in their families an altar to God—from those that would be chargeable with intoxication, or profane swearing, or kissing a book with a cross upon it when giving evidence in a civil court? Or, does your superior purity consist in the singing of modern paraphrases, instead of the ancient psalms of David? Or, do the members of your congregations in general prove themselves to be the genuine descendants of the ancient Covenanters, by their constant and diligent attendance upon social meetings for prayer and christian conversation? Now, my dear sir, *prove* that you excel the Modern Covenanters. Do not attempt to shrink from the task. If you do so, what will your intelligent hearers think of your courage, not to speak of your truth at all? If you are not able to do this, call in the assistance of some of your brethren, that are also *would-be Covenanters*. If you cannot prove your statement, restore the banner bearing the motto, "CHRIST'S CROWN AND COVENANT;" for then you will give evidence that it is none of yours. Indeed, it is certain it is none of

yours, so long as you participate with Arians and Roman Catholics, in the state emoluments. Attempt no longer to fight under false colours.

"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."

No more *at present*, but waiting your reply,

I remain, Rev. and dear Dr.,

Yours truly,

JOHN PAUL, JUN.